

THE SADDEST CRY FROM THE CROSS

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A SERMON
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“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.”
Matthew 27:46

DURING the time that “Moses kept the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law,” he “came to the mountain of God, even to Horeb,” and there he saw a strange sight—a bush that burned with fire, and yet was not consumed. Then Moses, apparently overtaken by curiosity, was drawing near in order to examine this phenomenon, when he heard God’s voice say to him, “Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

We also may well feel, as we think of our Lord Jesus in His agony, that the voice of God speaks to us from the cross and says, “Curiosity—bold, daring, prying intellect—draw not nigh hither; put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is the very Holy of Holies, unto which no man may come except as the Spirit of God shall conduct him hither.”

I think I can understand the words, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” as they are written by David in the twenty-second psalm, but the same words, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” when uttered by Jesus on the cross, I cannot comprehend, so I shall not pretend to be able to explain them. There is no plummet that can fathom this deep, there is no eagle’s eye that can penetrate the mystery that surrounds this strange question.

I have read that once upon a time, Martin Luther sat down in his study to consider this text. Hour after hour, that mighty man of God sat still, and those who waited on him came into the room, again and again, and he was so absorbed in his meditation that they almost thought he was a corpse. He moved neither hand nor foot, and neither ate nor drank, but sat with his eyes wide open, like one in a trance, thinking over these wondrous words, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” And when, after many long hours, in which he seemed to be utterly lost to everything that went on around him, he rose from his chair, someone heard him say, “God forsaking God! No man can understand that,” and so he went his way.

Though that is hardly the correct expression to use—I should hesitate to endorse it—yet I do not marvel that our text presented itself to the mind of Luther in that light. It is said that he looked like a man who had been down a deep mine, and who had come up again to the light. I feel more like one who has not been down the mine, but who has looked into it—or like one who has been part of the way down, and shuddered as he passed through the murky darkness, but who would not dare to go much lower, for this cry, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” is a tremendous deep, no man will ever be able to fathom it.

So I am not going to try to explain it, but first, to utter *some thoughts about it*, and then secondly, to draw *some lessons from it*. We may find many practical uses for things which are beyond the grasp of our minds, and this saying of our Lord may be of great service to us even though we cannot comprehend it.

I. First then, let me utter SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT THIS STRANGE QUESTION, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Jesus was accustomed to address God as His Father. If you turn to His many prayers, you will find Him almost invariably—if not invariably—speaking to God as His Father. And truly, He stands in that relationship both as God and as man. Yet in this instance, He does not say, “Father,” but “My God, my God.” Was it that He had any doubt about His Sonship? Assuredly not, Satan had assailed Him in the wilderness with the insinuation, “If thou be the Son of God,” but Christ had put him to the rout, and I feel persuaded that Satan had not gained any advantage over Him, even on the cross, which could have made Him doubt whether He was the Son of God or not.

I think that *our Savior was then speaking as man*, and that this is the reason why He cried, “My God, my God,” rather than “My Father.” I think He must have been speaking as man, as I can scarcely bring my mind to the point of conceiving that God the Son could say to God the Father, “My God, my God.” There is such a wonderful blending of the human and the divine in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ that though it may not be absolutely accurate to ascribe to the deity some things in the life of Christ, yet is He so completely God and man, that often Scripture does speak of things that must belong to the humanity only as if they belonged to the Godhead.

For instance, in his charge to the Ephesian elders, the apostle Paul said, “Feed the church of God, which he has purchased with His own blood”—an incorrect expression, if judged according to the rule of the logician, but accurate enough according to the Scriptural method of using words in their proper sense. Yet I do think that we must draw a distinction between the divinity and the humanity here. As the Lord Jesus said, “My God, my God,” it was because it was His humanity that was mainly to be considered just then.

And O my brethren, does it not show us *what a real man the Christ of God was, that He could be forsaken of His God?* We might have supposed that Christ being Emmanuel—God with us—the Godhead and the manhood being indissolubly united in one person, it would have been impossible for Him to be forsaken of God. We might also have inferred, for the same reason, that it would have been impossible for Him to have been scourged, and spit upon, and especially that it would not have been possible for Him to die. Yet all these things were made not only possible, but also sacredly certain.

In order to complete the redemption of His chosen people, it was necessary for Him to be both God’s well-beloved Son, and to be forsaken of His Father, He could truly say, as His saints also have sometimes had to say, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Persecuted and forsaken believer, behold your Brother in adversity! Behold the One who has gone wherever you may have to go, who has suffered more than you can ever suffer, and who has taken His part in the direst calamity that ever happened to human nature, so that He had to cry out in the agony of His soul, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

What was this forsaking? We are trying to come a little closer to this burning yet unconsumed bush—with our shoes off our feet, I hope, all the while—and in this spirit we ask, “What was this forsaking?” A devout writer says that it was *horror at the sight of human misery*. He affirms what is quite true, that our Lord Jesus Christ saw all that man had to suffer because of sin, that He perceived the total sum of the miseries brought by sin upon all the past, present, and future generations of the human race—and that He must have had a holy horror as He thought of all the woes of man, caused by sin in this life, and in that which is to come—and being completely one with man, He spoke in the name of man and said, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

That is all true, yet that explanation will not suffice, my brethren; because our Savior did not say, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken *man?*” but “Why hast thou forsaken *me?*” This forsaking was something personal to Himself.

Others have said that *it was a dreadful shrinking in His soul on account of human sin*. I have read of a child who had done wrong, and whose father had faithfully rebuked and punished him, but the boy remained callous and sullen. He sat in the same room with his father, yet he refused to confess that he had done wrong. At last the father, under a sense of his child’s great wickedness, burst into tears, and

sobbed and sighed. Then the boy came to his father, and asked him why he sorrowed so, and he answered, "Because of my child's hardness of heart."

It is true that our Lord Jesus Christ did feel as that father felt, only far more acutely, but our text cannot be fully explained by any such illustration as that, that would be only explaining it away, for Christ did not say, "My God, my God, why has man forsaken You, and why have You so completely left men in their sin?" No, His cry was, "Why hast thou forsaken *me*?" It was not so much the God of man to whom He appealed, but "*My God, my God.*" It was a personal grief that wrung from Him the personal cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken *me*?" for this forsaking, by His Father in whom He trusted, related peculiarly to Himself.

What was this forsaking? *Was it physical weakness?* Some of you may know that when the body is in a low condition, the soul also sinks. Quite involuntarily, unhappiness of mind, depression of spirit, and sorrow of heart will come upon you. You may be without any real reason for grief, and yet may be among the most unhappy of men because for the time, your body has conquered your soul. But my brethren and sisters, this explanation is not supposable in the case of Christ, for it was not many moments after this that He shouted, "with a loud voice," His conquering cry, "It is finished," and so passed from the conflict to His coronation.

His brave spirit overcame His physical weakness, and though He was "brought into the dust of death," and plunged into the deepest depths of depression of spirit, yet still, the cry, "My God, my God," which also was uttered "with a loud voice," proves that there was still a considerable amount of mental strength, notwithstanding His physical weakness, so that mere depression of spirit, caused by physical reasons, would not account for this agonizing cry.

And certainly, my brethren, *this cry was not occasioned by unbelief.* You know that sometimes, a child of God in sore trial, and with many inward struggles, cries out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken *me*?" when all the while, the Lord has been remembering the tried soul, and dealing graciously with it.

As long ago as Isaiah's day, "Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my LORD hath forgotten me." But the Lord's reply was, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hand."

Unbelief often makes us talk about God forgetting us when He does nothing of the kind, but our Lord Jesus Christ was a stranger to unbelief. It was impossible for Him to cherish any doubt about the faithfulness and lovingkindness of His Father, so His cry did not arise from that cause.

And another thing, *it did not arise from a mistake.* I have known believers in sore trouble, make great blunders concerning what God was doing with them. They have thought that He had forsaken them, for they misinterpreted certain signs and dealings of God, and they said, "All these things are against us; the hand of God has gone out against us to destroy us." But Christ made no mistake about this matter, for God had forsaken Him. It was really so. When He said, "Why hast thou forsaken *me*?" He spoke infallible truth, and His mind was under no cloud whatsoever. He knew what He was saying, and He was right in what He said, for His Father had forsaken Him for the time.

What then, can this expression mean? *Does it mean that God did not love His Son?* O beloved, let us, with the utmost detestation, fling away any suspicion of the kind that we may have harbored! God did forsake His Son, but He loved Him as much when He forsook Him as at any other period. I even venture to say that if it had been possible for God's love towards His Son to be increased, He would have delighted in Him more when He was standing as the suffering Representative of His chosen people than He had ever delighted in Him before.

We do not indulge for a single moment, the thought that God was angry with Him personally, or looked upon Him as unworthy of His love, or regarded Him as one upon whom He could not smile, because of anything displeasing in Himself, yet the fact remains that God had forsaken Him, for Christ was under no mistake about that matter. He rightly felt that His Father had withdrawn the comfortable

light of His countenance that He had, for the time being, lost the sense of His Father's favor—not the favor itself, but the consciousness of that divine aid and succor which He had formerly enjoyed—so He felt Himself like a man left all alone, and He was not only left all alone by His friends, but also by His God.

Can we at all imagine the state of mind in which our Lord was when He cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” No, that is not possible, yet I will try to help you to understand it. Can you imagine the misery of a lost soul in hell—one who is forsaken of God and who cries, in bitterest agony, “God will never look upon me in mercy, or delight, or favor”—can you picture that sad state? Well, if you can, you will not even then have got anywhere near the position of Christ, because that soul in hell does not want God's favor, and does not seek it, or ask for it. That lost soul is so hardened in sin that it never troubles about whether God would receive it if it repented, the truth is that it does not want to repent. The misery that men will suffer in the world to come, will be self-created misery arising out of the fact that they loved sin so much that they brought eternal sorrow upon themselves.

It must be an awful thing for a soul in the next world, to be without God, but as far as its own consciousness is concerned, it will be so hardened that it will abide without God, yet not realizing all that it has lost because it is itself incapable of knowing the beauty of holiness, and the perfection of the God from whom it is separated forever. Yet how different was the case of our Lord Jesus Christ when upon the cross! He knew, as no mere man could ever know, what separation from God meant.

Think of a case of another kind. King Saul, when the witch of Endor brought up the spirit of Samuel, said to him, “God is departed from me, and answers me no more.” You recollect the state of mind that he was in when the evil spirit was upon him, and he needed David's harp to charm it away, but at last, even that failed, and I know of no more unhappy character than Saul when God had departed from him. But somehow there was not the anguish in the soul of Saul that there would have been if he had ever really known the Lord. I do not think that he ever really did, in his inmost soul, know the Lord.

After Samuel anointed him, he was “turned into another man,” but he never became a new man, and the sense of God's presence that he had was not for a moment, comparable to that presence of God which a true saint enjoys, and which Christ always enjoyed, except when He was on the cross. So when Saul lost the consciousness of that presence, he did not suffer so great a loss, and consequently, as great an anguish, as afterwards happened to our Lord.

Coming nearer to our own circumstances, I remind you that there are some of God's people, who do really love Him, and who have walked in the light of His countenance, yet for some reason or other, they have lost the comfortable enjoyment of God's love. If any of you, dear friends, know what that sad experience is, you are getting a faint impression of the meaning of this cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!”

Oh, what an anguish it is—what heartbreak—even to think that one is forsaken of God! I have heard of people dying of broken hearts, but I believe that the man, who has been made to utter this cry, has gone as near to dying of a broken heart as anyone might well do without actually dying. To be without God, is to be without life, and we who love Him, can say with Dr. Watts—

*“My God, my life, my love,
To Thee, to Thee I call:
I cannot live, if Thou remove,
For Thou art All in all.”*

But my dear brethren, you have not got the whole truth yet, *for no saint knows the presence of God as Christ knew it*. No saint has to the full, enjoyed the love of God as Christ enjoyed it, and consequently, if he does lose it, he only seems to lose the moonlight whereas Christ lost the sunlight when for a time, the face of His Father was withdrawn from Him.

Only think what must have been the anguish of the Savior, especially as contrasted with His former enjoyment. Never did any mere human being know so much and enjoy so much of the love of God as Christ had done. He had lived in it, basked in it, there had never been any interruption to it. “I do always those things that please him,” said He, concerning His Father, and His Father twice said, concerning Him, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

Now, as our Lord Jesus Christ had enjoyed the love of God to the very full, think what it must have been for Him to lose the conscious enjoyment of it. You know that you may go into a room, and blow out the candle, but the blind people will not miss it. They miss the light most that have enjoyed it most, and Christ missed the light of God’s countenance most because He had enjoyed it most.

Then reflect upon His intense love to God. Jesus Christ—the man Christ Jesus—loved God with all His heart, and mind, and soul, and strength, as you and I have never yet been able to do. The love of Christ towards His Father was boundless. Well then, for a frown to be upon His Father’s face, or for the light of that Father’s face to be taken away from Him, must have made it correspondingly dark and terrible to Him.

Remember too, the absolute purity of Christ’s nature. In Him there was no taint of sin, nor anything approaching to it. Now, holiness delights in God. God is the very sea in which holiness swims—the air which holiness breathes. Only think then, of the perfectly Holy One, fully agreed with His Father in everything, finding out that the Father had, for good and sufficient reasons, turned away His face from Him. O brother, in proportion as you are holy, the absence of the light of God’s countenance will be grief to you, and as Jesus was perfectly holy, it was the utmost anguish to Him to have to cry to His Father, “Why hast thou forsaken me!”

After all, beloved, the only solution of the mystery is this; *Jesus Christ was forsaken of God because we deserved to be forsaken of God.* He was there, on the cross, in our room, and place, and stead, and as the sinner, by reason of his sin, deserves not to enjoy the favor of God, so Jesus Christ, standing in the place of the sinner, and enduring that which would vindicate the justice of God, had to come under the cloud, as the sinner must have come, if Christ had not taken his place.

But then, since He has come under it, let us recollect that He was thus left of God that you and I, who believe in Him, might never be left of God. Since He, for a little while, was separated from His Father, we may boldly cry, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” and with the apostle Paul, we may confidently affirm that nothing in the whole universe “shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Before I leave this point, let me say that *the doctrine of substitution is the key to all the sufferings of Christ.* I do not know how many theories have been invented to explain away the death of Christ. The modern doctrine of the apostles of “culture” is that Jesus Christ did something or other, which in some way or other, was in some degree or other, connected with our salvation, but it is my firm belief that every theory, concerning the death of Christ, which can only be understood by the highly cultured, must be false.

“That is strong language,” says someone. Perhaps it is, but it is true. I am quite sure that the religion of Jesus Christ was never intended for the highly cultured only, or even for them in particular. Christ’s testimony concerning His own ministry was, “The poor have the gospel preached to them,” so if you bring me a Gospel which can only be understood by gentlemen who have passed through Oxford or Cambridge University, I know that it cannot be the Gospel of Christ. He meant the good news of salvation to be proclaimed to the poorest of the poor, in fact, the gospel is intended for humanity in general, so if you cannot make me understand it, or if, when I do understand it, it does not tell me how to deliver its message in such plain language that the poorest man can comprehend it, I tell you, sirs, that your newfangled Gospel is a lie, and I will stick to the old one, which a man only a little above an idiot in intellect can understand.

I cling to the old Gospel for this, among many other reasons, that all the modern Gospels that leave out the great central truth of substitution, prevent the message from being of any use to the great mass of

mankind. If those other Gospels, which are not really Gospels, please your taste and fancy, and suit the readers of Quarterly Reviews, and eloquent orators and lecturers, there are the poor people in our streets, and the millions of working men, the vast multitudes who cannot comprehend anything that is highly metaphysical, and you cannot convince me that our Lord Jesus Christ sent as His message to the whole world, a metaphysical mystery that would need volume upon volume before it could even be stated.

I am persuaded that He gave us a rough and ready Gospel like this, “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost,” or this, “With his stripes we are healed,” or this, “The chastisement of our peace was upon him,” or this, “He died the just for the unjust to bring us to God.” Do not try to go beyond this Gospel, brethren, you will get into the mud if you do. But it is safe standing here, and standing here, I can comprehend how our Lord Jesus took the sinner’s place, and passing under the sentence which the sinner deserved, or under a sentence which was tantamount thereto, could cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

II. Now, in closing, I am going to draw A FEW LESSONS FROM THIS UTTERANCE OF CHRIST.

The first lesson is, *Behold how He loved us!* When Christ stood and wept at the grave of Lazarus, the Jews said, “Behold how he loved him!” But on the cross He did not weep, He bled, and He not merely bled, He died, and before He died, His spirit sank within Him, for He was forsaken of His God. Was there ever any other love like this—that the Prince of life and glory should condescend to this shame and death?

Then next, brothers and sisters, as He suffered so much for us, *let us be ready to suffer anything for His sake.* Let us be willing even to lose all the joy of religion, if that would glorify God. I do not know that it would, but I think the Spirit of Christ ought to carry us even as far as Moses went, when he pleaded for the guilty nation of Israel, and was willing to have his own name blotted out of the book of life rather than that God’s name should be dishonored.

We have never had to go as far as that, and we never shall, yet let us be willing to part with our last penny, for Christ’s name’s sake, if He requires it. Let us be willing to lose our reputation. Ah, it is a difficult thing to give that up! Some of us, when we first came into public notice, and found our words picked to pieces, and our character slandered, felt it rather hard. We have got used to it now, but it was very trying at first. But oh! If one had to be called a devil—if one had to go through this world, and to be spat upon by every passer-by—still, if it were endured for Christ’s sake, remembering how He was forsaken of God for us, we ought to take up even that cross with thankfulness that we were permitted to bear it.

Another lesson is that if ever you and I should feel that we are forsaken of God—if *we should get into this state in any way, remember that we are only where Christ has been before us.* If ever, in our direst extremity, we should be compelled to cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” we shall have gone down no deeper than Christ Himself went. He knows that feeling, and that state of heart, for He has felt the same. This fact should tend greatly to cheer you. Your deep depression is not a proof of reprobation, that is evident, for Christ Himself endured even more.

A man may say, “I cannot be a child of God, or else I should not feel as I do.” Ah! you do not know what true children of God may feel, strange thoughts pass through their minds in times of storm and doubt. A Puritan preacher was standing by the deathbed of one of his members who had been for thirty years in gloom of soul. The good old minister expected that the man would get peace at last, for he had been an eminent Christian, and had greatly rejoiced in his Savior, but for thirty years or more, he had fallen into deep gloom.

The minister was trying to speak a word of comfort to him, but the man said, “Ah, sir! but what can you say to a man who is dying, and yet who feels that God has forsaken him?” The pastor replied, “But what became of that Man who died, whom God really did forsake? Where is HE now?” The dying man caught at that, and said, “He is in glory, and I shall be with Him, I shall be with Him where He is.” And

so the light came to the dying man who had been so long in the dark, He saw that Christ had been just where he was, and that he should be where Christ was, even at the right hand of the Father.

I hope, brothers and sisters, that you will never get down so low as that, but I beseech you, if you ever meet with any others who are there, do not be rough with them. Some strong minded people are very apt to be hard upon nervous folk, and to say, "They should not get into that state." And we are liable to speak harshly to people who are very depressed in spirit, and say to them, "Really, you ought to rouse yourself out of such a state."

I hope none of you will ever have such an experience of this depression of spirit as I have had, yet I have learned from it to be very tender with all fellow sufferers. The Lord have mercy on them, and help them out of the Slough of Despond, for if He does not, they will sink in deep mire, where there is no standing.

I pray God specially to bless this inference from our text. *There is hope for you, brother, or sister, if you are in this condition.* Christ came through it, and He will be with you in it, and after all, you are not forsaken as He was, be you sure of that. With you, the forsaking is only in the apprehension, that is bad enough, but it is not a matter of fact, for "the LORD will not forsake his people," nor cast away even one of those whom He has chosen.

I will tell you what is a much more awful thing even than crying out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" If you are afraid that God has left you, and the sweat stands on your brow in very terror, and if your soul seems to long for death rather than life, in such a state as that, you are not in the worst possible condition. "Why!" you ask, "is there anything worse than that?" Yes, I will tell you what is much worse than that, that is to be without God, and not to care about it—to be living, like some whom I am now addressing, without God, and without hope, yet that never concerns them at all.

I can pity the agony of the man who cannot bear to be without his God, but at the same time, I can bless the Lord that he feels such agony as that, for that proves to me that his soul will never perish. But those, whom I look upon with fear and trembling, are the men who make a profession of religion, yet who never have any communion with God, and all the while, are quite happy about it—or backsliders, who have gone away from God, and yet seem perfectly at ease.

You, worldlings, who are quite satisfied with the things of this world, and have no longings for the world that is to come, I wish you had got as far as to be unhappy; I wish you had got as far as to be in an agony, for that is the road to heavenly joy. It was thus that Christ won it for us, and it is by such a path as this, that many a soul is first led into the experience of His saving power.

Brethren, weep not for those of us who sometimes have to cry out in anguish of soul, mourn not for us who are cast down because we cannot live without Christ. You see that our Lord has made us covet the highest blessings, our heads have been so often on His bosom that if they are not always there, we keep on crying till we get back to that blessed position again. This is a sweet sorrow, may we have more and more of it!

But oh! I pray you, pity those who never ate the bread of heaven—never drank of the water of life—never knew the sweetness of the kisses of Christ's mouth—and never knew what it was to have a heaven begun below in the enjoyment of fellowship with Him. In such cases, your pity is indeed required.

I have finished when I have just said this—as you come to the table of your Lord, come, brothers and sisters, with this cry of Christ ringing in your ears, to make you love Him more than ever, and as you eat the bread, and drink the wine, do it all out of fervent love to Him, and the Lord bless you, for His name's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MATTHEW 27:27-54

Verses 27-30. *Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head.*

These soldiers were men to whom the taking of human life was mere amusement, or at best, a duty to be performed. If the ordinary Roman citizen found his greatest delight in the amphitheater, where men fiercely fought with each other, and shed each other's blood, or were devoured by wild beasts, you may imagine what Roman soldiery—the roughest part of the whole population—would be like, and now that One was given up into their hands, charged with making Himself a king, you can conceive what a subject for jest it was to them, and how they determined to make all the mockery they could of this pretended king.

They were not touched by the gentleness of His demeanor, or by His sorrowful countenance, but they proceeded to pour all possible scorn and insult upon His devoted head. Surely, the world never saw a more marvelous scene than this—the King of kings derided, and made nothing of—treated as a mimic monarch by the very vilest and most brutal of men.

31. *And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.*

Their action, in restoring to Him His own seamless robe, was overruled by God—whatever their motive may have been—so that nobody might say that some other person had been substituted for the Savior. He went forth wearing that well-known garment, which was woven from the top throughout, which He had always worn, and all who looked upon Him said, “It is He—the Nazarene. We know His face, His dress, His person.” There was no possibility of mistaking Him for anybody else.

32. *And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.*

It was too heavy for Him to carry alone, so they bade Simon help Him, and truly, I think that Simon was thereby highly honored. If this was Simon, who is called Niger, then there may be some truth in the common belief that he was a black man, and assuredly, the colored race has long had to carry a very heavy cross, yet there may be a great destiny before it.

All Christ's followers are called to be cross-bearers—

*“Shall Simon bear the cross alone,
And all the rest go free?
No, there's a cross for every one,
And there's a cross for me.”*

If we belong to Christ, we must be as willing to take up His cross as He was to carry ours, and die upon it.

33-34. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say a place of a skull, they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*

It was not because of its bitterness that our Lord refused it, for He did not decline to endure anything that would add to His grief, but this was a stupefying draught, a death potion, which was given to those who were executed, in order to somewhat mitigate their pains, but the Savior did not intend that His senses should be beclouded by any such draught as that, so “when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.”

35. *And they crucified him,—*

A short sentence, but what an awful depth of meaning there is in it! “They crucified him”—driving their iron bolts through His hands and feet, and lifting Him up to hang upon the gibbet which was reserved for felons and for slaves, “They crucified him,”—

35. *And parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.*

It was the executioners' perquisite to have the garments of the man they put to death, so in order that no single portion of the shame of the cross might be spared to the Savior, these soldiers divided His garments amongst them, and raffled for His seamless robe. It must have taken a hard heart to gamble at the foot of the cross, but I suppose that, of all sins under heaven, there is none that does so harden the heart as gambling. Beware of it!

36. *And sitting down they watched him there;*

Some to gloat, in their fiendish malice, over His sufferings, others, to make sure that He did really die, and possibly, some few to pity Him in His agony, "Sitting down they watched him there."

37-44. *And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.*

And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God: let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

So that as He looked all around He met with nothing but ribaldry, and jest, and scorn. His disciples had all forsaken Him. One or two of them afterwards rallied a little, and came and stood by the cross, but just then, He looked, and there was none to pity, and none to help Him, even as it had been foretold.

45. *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.*

From twelve o'clock at noon, according to the Roman and Jewish time, till three in the afternoon, there was a thick darkness—whether over all the world, or only over the land of Palestine, we cannot very well say. It was not an eclipse of the sun, it was a miracle specially wrought by God. Some have supposed that dense clouds came rolling up obscuring everything, but whatever it was, deep darkness came over all the land.

Dore has, in his wonderful imagination, given us a sketch of Jerusalem during that darkness. The inhabitants are all trembling at what they had done, and as Judas goes down the street, they point at him as the man who sold his Master, and brought all this evil upon the city. I should think that such darkness at midday must have made them fear that the last day had come, or that some great judgment would overtake them for their wicked slaughter of the innocent Jesus of Nazareth. Even the sun could no longer look upon its Maker surrounded by those who mocked Him, so it traveled on in tenfold night, as if in very shame that the great Sun of righteousness should Himself be in such awful darkness.

46-48. *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.*

For He had also said, "I thirst," which John records, specially mentioning that He said this, "that the Scripture might be fulfilled."

49-51. *The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.*

Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom;

That rending of the great veil of the temple was intended to symbolize the end of Judaism, the horror of the sanctuary that its Lord was put to death, the opening of the mysteries of heaven, the clearing of the way of access between man and God.

51. *And the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;*

Well says our poet—

***“Of feeling, all things show some sign
But this unfeeling heart of mine.”***

52-54. *And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

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